



SENATOR

Mary Margaret Haugen

E-Newsletter - 10th District

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10th Legislative District

February 19, 2010

Good day,

I've had an extremely busy week that focused around the controversy of Initiative 960. I have heard from many of you via emails and telephone calls. We are hearing frustration, fear and anger on the other from many of you. I take all of your input very seriously and always want to hear what's on your mind.

I must say I am disappointed in the lack of civility on the part of a few callers towards my staff. While it's certainly acceptable to disagree with my position on an issue, the tone from some callers has been anything but civil, and has included threats and personal attacks. My staff work hard to serve the people of our district and are happy to take your input and pass it on to me.

As to I-960, I'm sure you've heard plenty about it by now and I think you deserve to know where I'm coming from regarding my vote.

THE TRUTH ABOUT I-960

To start, I would like to reiterate my reasons for voting to suspend I-960. Last year the legislature made severe cuts in public services to balance the budget. This year, with revenues continuing to lag, even deeper cuts loom — and I think long and hard about who those cuts will hurt. There will be increased cuts no matter what happens. As many of you may know, in my 28 years in the legislature, I have never voted for a general tax increase, but these are extraordinarily difficult times.

I think about those among us who can't fend for themselves. I think about the elderly and the young. A retiree on a fixed income or in a nursing home is at our mercy, and I am not going to pass a budget that punishes the most vulnerable among us.

Similarly, our children have no control over how much we cut education, whether it involves class size or quality curricula or making sure our state universities are accessible to the young men and women who will make up our workforce for decades to come. I want to make sure Washingtonians can receive the quality education they will need to land good jobs.

We are in the middle of probably the most far-reaching economic crisis of our lives, and extraordinary times call for extraordinary action. Suspending a voter initiative for two years — which is about how long economists estimate it will take for our economy to begin moving again — is a reasonable, measured response to make sure we have the flexibility to address our state's needs in the most intelligent, responsible way.

Balancing the budget isn't all about taxes. It's going to take several different approaches.

We will start by looking to close loopholes in the tax code. Every year we create new tax exemptions that we think will make our state stronger. While those exemptions made sense at the time, as the years go on many of them become outmoded or unnecessary, so it only makes sense to discontinue them. I-960 changed hundreds of years of state law by requiring a two-thirds vote on tax-related measures — and a two-thirds vote can be extremely hard to get. So before we can even think about closing our tax loopholes, we needed to suspend I-960 and allow passage by the basic majority vote that applies to other legislation.

From there we will look at more cuts to public services. Those cuts will go deeper than what we cut last year, and they will hurt many people. But at some point they will hurt too many people. That's where we will have to draw the line and consider a small tax increase to cover the remaining budget shortfall. Property taxes are off the table, and I would refuse to vote to raise property taxes in any case. Nor will I support an increase in the business-and-occupation tax. The last thing we want to do is make it harder to do business at a time when our neighbors are fighting just to keep their jobs.

While I'm at it, I'd like to address the accusations of some that we rushed the legislation through the Senate. Many of the people who claim we're moving too fast are the same people who complained that we weren't moving fast enough just a few weeks ago. In the second week of session, when the legislature tried to take early action to cut state spending, many of these same people who said we weren't moving fast enough to reduce spending voted "no" against those cuts.

Others have accused us of acting secretly, so let me be as blunt as I can about that. The Senate Majority Leader announced before the session even began that a cuts-only budget wouldn't work two years in a row—public services had already been cut to the bone to balance last year's budget. The Majority Leader clearly and plainly said the Senate would have to look at taxes this year — and you can't do that without addressing I-960. Everyone on both sides of the aisle knew in advance of when it was coming. No one was trying to sneak anything by anyone. In this place, frankly, it's impossible — the legislative process was purposely designed to make it difficult to pass laws — and nothing gets passed without both sides knowing perfectly well what's been proposed with ample opportunity to challenge it.

These are tough times. I don't like the idea of raising taxes, but sometimes this is necessary when our most vulnerable would be devastated by the alternative.

I don't expect everyone to agree with me, but I hope you'll at least think about what I'm saying before you buy into the all-too-popular notion that it's wrong to raise taxes under any circumstances. We're in the middle of the economic crisis of our lives, and it's going to take a little medicine to get us out of it.

THREE MORE CUTS IN STATE SPENDING

Earlier this week, Gov. Gregoire [signed into law](#) a trio of bills that we passed early in this legislative session to cut state spending.

[House Bill 2921](#) curbs out of state travel, the filling of open positions and equipment purchases. [House Bill 2998](#) prohibits bonuses paid to state employees. And [Senate Bill 6382](#) extends the salary freeze placed on many state employees.

These are by no means the last of the cuts we'll need to make before session ends, but they're good early steps to help narrow the gap on balancing the budget.

REDUCING THE SIZE OF GOVERNMENT

Our state employees work hard to provide services that are essential to Washingtonians in all walks of life. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't keep looking for ways to make government more efficient.

My [Senate Bill 6214](#) will save money by consolidating the powers, duties, and functions of the three regional Growth Management Hearings Boards into a single Growth Management Hearings Board. The three regional boards made sense when we first created them, but times change, and today we can accomplish their work just as efficiently with one board that reduces the overall number of commissioners and cuts down on staff and overhead.

This bill has passed the Senate and awaits action in the House of Representatives. The same is the case for the next two bills I'm going to talk about.

PRESERVING OUR AGRICULTURAL BASE

Having lived my entire life in our beautiful 10th District, I appreciate the value of our farmlands — and the increasing pressures of development which would remove forever the character that makes our communities here so special. That makes me listen hard when farmers ask for help, and two of my bills this year are the direct result of farmers' suggestions.

The first of these, [Senate Bill 6211](#), would preserve farmland by designating a new agricultural scenic corridor within the scenic and recreational highway system. An agricultural scenic corridor showcases and protects our state's historical agricultural areas from development — and ensures that our children and grandchildren can grow up to enjoy the same wonderful aspects of our region as we did.

Another way we preserve farmland is by helping our farmers with common-sense laws. Although farms have relied for years on simple roadside signs to direct consumers to their farms and items for sale, the state has strict regulations that largely ban such signs.

[Senate Bill 6208](#) gives farmers the right to post temporary signs and continue one of the time-honored traditions that is a staple for both farmers and consumers of fresh produce and other farm products.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO ASSISTING YOU!

As always, if you have a concern, I want to hear it. My local office is closed during the legislative session so that my staff can focus on the heavy flow of constituents here on the Capitol Campus in Olympia, so the best ways to reach me are by [e-mail](#) or at my office in Olympia at **360-786-7618**, where legislative assistants Nova Gattman and Gina Bull and session intern Sheryl McCrary will be more than happy to help you.

Until next time — Take care!

Thank you for reading my email newsletter. I appreciate your interest in the legislative process. If at any time you decide you no longer wish to receive updates from me, please go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/member.aspx?member=haugenm> to remove your name from the list.

Washington Senate Democratic Caucus